

however . . . Kenneth Robinson

Your date with the good life

The January sales are offering good value for the whole family with the cut-price pocket diaries for 1988. I'm told that a lot of people buy more than one of these at a time, because of the specialized information in everything from the *Sex Maniac's Diary* to the *Paddington Bear Diary*.

A quick browse through the latest collection will teach you how to make your raisins more plump (*Woman's Own Diary*), why you must never leave your peeled banana in the fridge (*Brownie Diary*), and what a Scout ought to do in a thunderstorm.

The last hint is printed in the *Scout's Diary*, where a diagram shows that a boy can avoid being struck by lightning if he squats in the centre of a room with his knees up. There is advice, too, on what a Scout can do if a passer-by collapses. "Put up a tent," says the diary. It goes on to say, reasonably enough, "if you have one".

The *Scout's Diary* also warns readers that February 22 is to be "Girl Guide Thinking Day". The Scouts are not told how to cope with such an emergency, but they can, in fact, get an insight into a Guide's mind by reading her own *Girl Guide's Diary*. This shows her to be unusually inventive with a polythene bag, which she uses as a dog's drinking bowl, a basket for raspberries, a saddle cover, a hat for her mother and a toy parachute for her small brother.

Ingenuity of this kind is provided every year in the *TV Times Diary*, by Katie Boyle. Last year she told readers how to prevent their brittle eyelashes snapping off in bed, and this time she advises them to pour eggs and brandy over their heads before a shampoo. They should also rub granulated sugar and vegetable oil on their hands and feet, says Katie, before plunging the feet into hot water garnished with fresh nettles. This, it seems, is particularly refreshing after a day's shopping.

Shopping can now be quite hazardous, as well as tiring, says the *Woman and Home Diary*. It seems that the shopper who buys food when she is hungry often chooses the most fattening things out of greed. If she is *really* tempted to eat the wrong sort of food, says the diary, she should do something energetic instead, such

as walking, gardening, cleaning out a cupboard or visiting a friend.

And when she *does* get round to eating, says the *Woman Diary*, she should always use a tiny plate, so that even a small portion looks quite big, and she can deceive herself into cutting down on calories. Such a fanatical dieter will certainly need the *Slimming Diary*. In 10 minutes, she is told, 20 calories are lost by knitting or playing darts, 30 by bedmaking or roller skating, and 60 by walking upstairs or windsurfing.

For anyone who wants more out of life than preoccupation with food, there are details of the maximum sizes of umbrellas, dustbins and baby grand pianos. (*Architect and Builder Diary*.) Then there is unexpected guidance, in the *Woman's Weekly Diary*, for parents whose "toddler" has turned pink in sunshine. It should be dipped, they are told, in a solution of warm water and bicarbonate of soda.

The more "obstinate" stains, as women's magazines like to call them, are something the diaries often disagree about. A beer stain, says the *She Diary*, requires cold water. Warm water is best, says the *Woman's Weekly Diary*. And the *Lady's Diary* has always insisted on "boiling water poured from a height". There is disagreement, too, in the diary horoscopes. If a woman is a Leo, she will learn from *Woman's Weekly Diary* that she is a natural leader. But *Look Now Diary* says that a Leo lacks confidence.

Finally, for those who want to know *how* to become confident this year, there is advice from the Bible Society's *Good News Diary*. Confidence can be acquired, it tells readers, if they think only about things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report. That, of course, is even more difficult today than it was when Paul suggested it to the Philippians. A lot of people may prefer *Primo Diary's* short-cut to confidence. "Take a deep breath through the nose," it says, "and then breathe out through the mouth and repeat. This always works."

I shall leave you with that thought for the year. Coupled with the age-old wisdom of Katie Boyle. "Never," she says, "get rusty on your wok."

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